

Community Profile

Residents would prefer Duxbury to remain just as it is

By Davis Bushnell
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

DUXBURY — Why fix it if it isn't broken? That is the attitude in Duxbury, where residents say they're very content, thank you, with this historic town's quaintness and waterfront beauty. "Residents don't want commercial development," said James M. Murphy, chairman of the Board of Selectmen, noting that conservation land totals more than 1,000 acres.

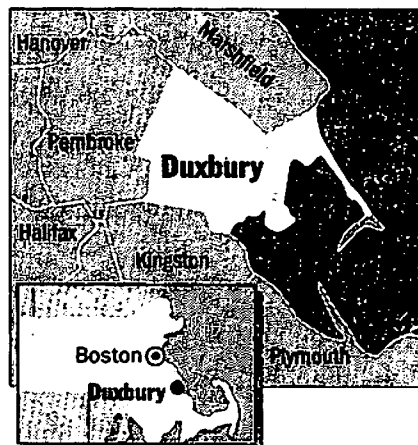
"People are willing to trade the additional tax dollars that would come from commercial-industrial development for the quiet, residential ambience."

Larry Lynch, a longtime antique dealer and owner of the Duxbury Galleries, added, "The streets are still rolled up at 7 each night. There's no such as thing as industry here."

Originally called Duxborough, Duxbury was settled in 1624 by members of the Plymouth Colony such as Myles Standish, John Alden and Elder Brewster, who were seeking pasture land. From that land, they could also keep an eye on things in Plymouth, a few miles across the bay.

Today, the Pilgrims' settlement in Duxbury is memorialized by street names, including Mayflower, Standish, Alden, and Priscilla [Alden] Lane.

Beginning in the early 1700s and ending in the late 1880s, Duxbury was renowned as a shipbuilding center. The mansion built in 1809 by Ezra Weston, who was referred to as "King Caesar," befitting his reputation as one of the world's most influential shipowners, now anchors the town's shipbuilders' district. There are over 100 historic buildings off Washington Street. After the decline of the shipbuild-



Duxbury at a glance

Incorporated: 1637.
Area: 24.5 square miles.
Distance from Boston: 30 miles.
Population: 14,512.
Voters: 9,301.
Tax rate: \$17.30.
Form of government: Open town meeting and three selectmen.
Services: Commonwealth Electric, Bay State Gas.
Median house price (first quarter 1996): \$215,000.
Public schools: 2 elementary, 1 junior-senior high.
Hospital: Nearest is Jordan in Plymouth.
Library: Duxbury Free.
Houses of worship: 1 Catholic, 1 Episcopal, 1 Congregational, 1 Christian Science, 1 Methodist, 1 Unitarian, 1 Baptist, 1 Church of the Nazarene.
Cable TV: Adelphia.

ing era, residents subsisted on doing the finishing work for Brockton shoe and boot manufacturers.

In this century, Duxbury has been highly regarded as a summer community and, for the last 30 years or so, as a year-round residence for business executives working in Boston. "We're seeing a lot of the dual-income professionals, or husbands and wives who have top management jobs and can afford the higher prices here," said John Kolstad, an owner of Century 21-Walker Brothers in Duxbury.

Home buyers are also attracted to Duxbury, Kolstad and others said, because of the town's historic properties, its five-mile-long beach, picturesque harbor and other places of interest like the Art Complex Museum, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary.

Work will begin shortly on dredging the harbor "to restore navigable waterways," said Murphy, adding that the \$1.9 million project is expected to be completed in late fall.

Other projects include converting, at a cost of \$6 million, an old high school building to a 40,000-square-foot public library, and establishing septic districts in the Snug Harbor and Bluefish River areas. The library will be finished next year, and the sewer-connection work, which will benefit 17 small businesses as well as the Duxbury Yacht Club, will be completed in three months, Murphy said.

Residential construction occurs only sporadically in Duxbury because of the limited amount of land for that purpose, real estate agents said.

"There are no large subdivisions being

built, as is the case elsewhere," said Carol Nappellio, vice president and manager of DeWolfe New England's Duxbury office. "Parcels [of land] are developed here and there," she added, pointing out that new houses inland command prices of \$395,000 and up, new waterfront estates between \$800,000 and \$900,000, for the most part.

The highest-priced property on the market recently was a \$1.2 million, 14-room house on a 20-acre parcel that also includes a heated horse barn and riding ring. The lowest-priced dwelling was a \$99,000 summer cottage, Nappellio said.

For the first five months of 1996, the average asking and sale prices of houses in Duxbury, she said, were \$266,000 and \$253,000, respectively. Last year, about 85 percent of the houses sold were in the \$150,000-\$400,000 range, she noted.

During the first quarter of this year, the median price of properties sold in Duxbury was \$215,000, or \$5,000 more than a year earlier, according to Banker & Tradesman. First-quarter 1996 median prices in nearby towns were \$210,000, Cohasset; \$192,000, Scituate; \$189,000, Norwell; \$157,000, Hanover; \$150,000, Pembroke; and \$130,000, Marshfield.

"Duxbury is transitioning and preserving," Kolstad suggested, adding one-acre zoning has helped to limit new development. "This town made it clear years ago that shopping centers and office parks would not be welcomed here."

Looking ahead to the next century, town planners will begin formulating soon a five-year plan, based on views of voters who responded to a survey, Murphy said.

A good sign for the future is that "more and more younger people appear to be moving into the an-